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FM AMCONSUL PESHAWAR
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7877
INFO RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL IMMEDIATE 1429
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI IMMEDIATE 1063
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE 0825
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE IMMEDIATE 1787
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI IMMEDIATE 1794
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RHMFIASS/FBI WASHINGTON DC
RHMFIASS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL
RHMFIASS/CDR USSOCOM MACDILL AFB FL
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 PESHAWAR 000050

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 3/13/2019
TAGS: PTER MOPS PGOV ASEC PK
SUBJECT: NWFP: ATTACK ON ANP SENIOR MINISTER

CLASSIFIED BY: Lynne Tracy, Principal Officer, Peshawar,
Department of State.

REASON: 1.4 (a), (b), (d)
Summary

¶1. (C) Militants staged an attack in Peshawar on Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) Senior Minister Bashir Bilour of the Awami National Party (ANP) on March 11 that left Bilour unharmed but six others dead and five wounded. This latest attack on ANP underscores the limits of the government's deal in Swat. While Tehrik-i-Taliban (TTP) Swat may have halted the violence against ANP in Swat, fellow militants in the frontier apparently do not feel bound by that ceasefire. Despite this latest evidence of the one-sided nature of the militants' bargaining with the government, we doubt that this attack will deter the ANP from continuing to pursue the Swat peace deal. (Note: Principal Officer has requested a call on Bilour.) End Summary.

Attack on ANP Minister

¶2. (U) According to local police contacts, NWFP Senior Minister Bilour (ANP) on March 11 was inspecting development projects in his constituency in Peshawar's Old City (approximately 4 km southeast of the Consulate). Bilour was on foot with a police security detail in the popular, congested Namak Mandi bazaar. At approximately 1630 (local), a young man in his late teens, wearing a suicide jacket, emerged from a nearby street and began running toward Bilour with his hands in the air, shouting "Allah Akbar." (Note: While some reports described the attacker as lobbing grenades, none appear to have gone off.)

¶3. (U) Police fired on the attacker, who was unsuccessful in reportedly attempting to detonate his suicide vest. The attacker was able to retreat in the ensuing panic by the crowd. At some point, he was joined by a second young man, and the pair forced their way into a house in the bazaar area. Police tracked the two to the house, and a 40-minute firefight ensued. The exchange ended when the attacker detonated the suicide jacket. The assault left six dead, including the attackers and occupants of the house, and five wounded. The death toll may rise because of the severity of the injuries among wounded.

¶ 4. (U) The attack on Bilour is the latest in a string of militant attacks on ANP supporters and the second on Bilour who was believed to be the target of a November 11 suicide attack at a sports event in Peshawar. The highest volume of violence against ANP has been in Swat where the party hold six of the seven Provincial Assembly seats, but militants have demonstrated an ability to repeatedly go after political targets in other parts of the NWFP.

¶ 5. (U) In Peshawar, militants killed an ANP provincial parliamentarian on February 11 with a roadside improvised explosive device that hit his vehicle following a visit to a constituency project. In Charsadda, home to some of the NWFP's leading political families, militants have staged several high profile attacks -- October 2008: a suicide attack against ANP leader Asfandyar Wali Khan at his family compound killed two; February 2008: an attack on an ANP rally with deputy leader Afrasiab Khattak; December 2007: a suicide attack at mosque on the family compound of former Interior Minister Aftab Sherpao killed over 50; and April 2007: a suicide attack at a Sherpao rally killed nearly 30 and lightly wounded Sherpao.

Comment

¶ 6. (C) Bilour and his brothers represent a prominent Peshawar-based business family and are among ANP's oldest and most important supporters, particularly on party financing. Bashir is ANP's senior minister in the Provincial Assembly and holds the Local Government portfolio. His brother Ghulam is a Member of the National Assembly and Minister of Railways.

¶ 7. (S/NF) Bilour was not a primary player in the Swat peace deal

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discussions of February 2009 or May 2008, but he has spoken regularly in public in favor of these and similar agreements. This latest attack on ANP underscores the limits of the government's deal in Swat. TTP leader Baitullah Mehsud has reportedly placed a high premium on targeting ANP leaders and was the likely author of some of the attacks on ANP figures in the NWFP. While TTP Swat may have halted the violence against ANP in Swat, fellow militants in the frontier apparently do not feel bound by that ceasefire. Despite this latest evidence of the one-sided nature of the militants' bargaining with the government, we doubt that this attack will deter the ANP from continuing to pursue the Swat peace deal.

TRACY